What a Real Poet is Really Like

Men who knew James Whitcomb Riley and his work intimately tell something about the great Hoosier who played upon the heartstrings of a nation with his songs of common folk and manners

NOWADAYS a poetic genius doesn't look like one. On the street, you might guess him to be a business man or a lawyer or a preacher or a photographer. Not since the time of Edgar Allan Poe have real poets worn their hair long—as in the comic pictures—or affected the soulful expression. Nowadays when a man wears his hair like Spanish moss on a FloNda oak he is suspected of being hard up. And if he exhibits what is supposed to be his soul by certain shifting and staring of his eyes he is pitied as one whose mental gearing has sand in it.

Bliss Carman, former editor of the Independent and a poet of note, was one of James Whitcomb Riley's closest friends. After the Indiana songster's death on July 23, Carman told much about Riley to Mr. Joyce Kilmer of the New York Times Magazine and Mr. Kilmer in turn told it to the public.

Some 30 years ago Carman was introduced to the already famous Hoosier. Riley's keen bird-like eyes surveyed the tall frame of the new and young acquaintance: "Gosh, you're a stalwart, ain't ye?" he remarked, grinning. "I guess your parents must have trained you on a trellis."

Then, as reported by Mr. Kilmer, Carman went on to say:

"The next time I saw Riley was in Philadelphia. I went to read before the Browning society, and I don't mind telling you that I was scared to death. When I got out all alone on the stage and saw a thousand people staring up at me I felt more like running away than doing anything else. But when I saw Riley down in the audience, looking at me in his quaint, friendly way, then I felt all right. I wasn't afraid to read my poetry to Riley.

"After the reading was over Riley tucked me under his arm and said: 'Now, let's get around to the hotel and we'll take off our shoes and get a chew of tobacco and be comfortable.'

"You know, such remarks as this were all the more piquant because Riley was so very punctilious and scrupulous in all his personal habits. He always was immaculately dressed. I never knew him even to make so much of a concession to comfort as to put on a smoking jacket or a lounge coat. But he liked to go to his room and stretch himself on his bed and talk. And he never talked about anything but literature, chiefly poetry.

"Riley had a great fund of knowledge of poetry and knew lots of out-of-the-way homely verse. He delighted particularly in ridiculously bad newspaper verse.

"Riley liked to read poetry aloud. When I went to his house of an evening, he generally was waiting for me with some favorite book, ready to read aloud."

"What sort of poetry did he prefer?"

"His tastes covered a wide range. Two poets to whom he was especially devoted were Longfellow and Swinburne.

"Riley liked Longfellow's directness and simplicity. The things that pleased him in Swinburne's work were the music and the deft craftsmanship.

"After Riley had received his degrees from some of the colleges, he seemed to feel that he ought to be known as a poet, rather than as a humorist and writer of dialect verse. He tried hard to live up to the name of poet, and wanted his nonsense rhymes of his vagabondage forgotten. Yet his vernacular verse, or, as he called it, his dialect verse, was his chief contribution to literature.

"Riley was just a poet. That was all he ever cared to be. He was not interested in anything but poetry. He knew nothing of politics—he had not voted for 30 years. And as for philosophy, he had nothing but contempt for the modern thinkers.

"There was something very pathetic and charming about Riley's tenacity in holding the serious poet pose. His nonsense was just one of his ways of writing which happened to prove popular; when he got a chance to write in another way how engerly he seized it, and how persistently he clung to it!

"His last years were the happiest of his life, I think. He had his own car and rode around Indianapolis and its suburbs every day, generally taking with him some friend. He was honored and loved, and I think he felt that life had been good to him.

"Riley's father was a lawyer. His grandfather came to Indiana from Pennsylvania. His grandmother on his mother's side was Pennsylvania Dutch. His father was Irish.

"Riley had many prejudices. He disliked Poe very much. He disliked Poe's character so much that he could hardly read his poetry. Of course, he must have liked Poe's music and splendid metrical effects.

"Of course, you know the story of Riley's famous imitation of Poe? He had taken a position on the staff of an Anderson, Ind., paper, and the editor of a rival paper kept ridiculing him. Riley wanted to get even with him, so he wrote his imitation of Poe, and had it published in a paper in another part of the state with an elaborate story about the discovery of the manuscript.

"At once it made a great sensation all over the country. It made so great a sensation that Riley was terrified, and feared that he would be accused of literary forgery. Meanwhile the editor of the rival paper wrote: 'No doubt our young friend Riley will belittle this poem and say it is not the work of Poe. But it is Poe, and Poe's best manner.' The sensation grew to such proportions that Riley had to confess that he had written the poem. And then the editor of the paper discharged Riley because he had not published it in his paper.

"Then the Indianapolis Journal gave him a job, which he held for years. He wrote reams of nonsense verse, and wrote up in verse the shops of the merchants who advertised in the Journal.

"Riley's first book was called 'The Old Swimmin' Hole and 'Leven More Poems.' He published it himself. It sold so well that it was soon taken over by a publisher, and passed through many editions.

"Riley's exquisite penmanship showed the care with which he wrote. Originally he wrote a careless and rather illegible script, but he had so much difficulty in getting the printers to read his writing, and printing his dialect verse correctly, that he took up the study of penmanship. He was careful always to get the dialect of one part of Indiana as distinct from the dialect of any other part.

"'Any man's character,' he said, 'is best remembered, I suppose, by some of his habitual gestures and expressions.' I remember Riley as very deliberate in his motions, especially in his last years. Smooth shaven, ruddy, well groomed, he looked like a benign old English bishop more than anything else."

Mr. Don Marquis of the New York Sun aptly considers Riley and his poetry from an entirely different angle.

"James Whitcomb Riley," says he, "was the companion of fairies in Arcady; for the Hoosier belongs to a race apart. And while some are captured and broken to trade, the gentle poet escaped and kept always the vision of hidden things."

With these prefatory remarks the writer goes on with his essay:

"There are two sorts of Indianan—the ordinary Indianan, who is not so very different from the Ohioan or the Illinoisan, and the Hoosier.

"The Hoosier belong not merely to a race apart, but to a separate species. He is human, but with a difference; he is aware of the kinship between humanity and the so-called lower animals (and even the plants and streams) on the one side, and on the other side of the kinship of humanity with the elves.

"When the moon turns the mists to silver and the owls wail and the frogs wake up along the creeks and lakes and the fairies saddle and bridle the fireflies and mount them and go whirring and flashing off in search of airy adventures the Hoosiers steal out of the farmhouses and hamlets and creep down to the bottom lands and dance and sing and cavort under the summer stars. They do so secretly, dodging the mere humans, for secrecy is the essence of their midnight, whimsical revels.

"In the daytime they pretend they are just ordinary Indianans; their own brothers and mothers may not realize that they are Hoosiers.

"But in Indiana, as elsewhere, there is business and the need to attend to it. There must have been even in Arcady—somebody owned the flocks and herds of Arcady and turned them into butcher's meat and leather, and the shepherds only piped on the sufferance of their commercial-minded masters. These Hoosiers, these wild bards and prancing, long-legged lovers of the moon, are often captured and broken and tamed to trade and industry by the more sordid citizenry. They are yoked to the handle end of the plow, chained to the desk; by the hundreds and thousands they become clerks and salesmen and railroad presidents and novelists and business men of all sorts.

"James Whitcomb Riley was a Hoosier who happily escaped; he was never captured, never enslaved; the things hidden from the rest of us, or revealed only in flashes, remembered but vaguely from the days of our own happy Hoosierdom, he continued to see steadily; he lived among them familiarly to the end, and until the end was their interpreter to us.

"'Bud come here to your uncle a spell,' says Riley in effect, 'and I'll show you not only a fairy, but a fairy who has for the moment chosen to be just as much of a Hoosier as the Raggedy Man, or Orphant Annie, or Old Kingry, or the folks at Griggsby Station.'

"The critics and the learned doctors of literature are already debating as to whether Riley had imagination or only fancy. (It would be a terrible calamity to some of them if they said it was imagination and it was officially declared later to be merely fancy; that is the sort of mistake that damns a critic and makes the sons and grandsons of critics meek, hacked, apologetic young men.) And doubtless the point is exceedingly important. For if a poet has imagination they say his work is significant. And if he has only fancy his work is not significant.

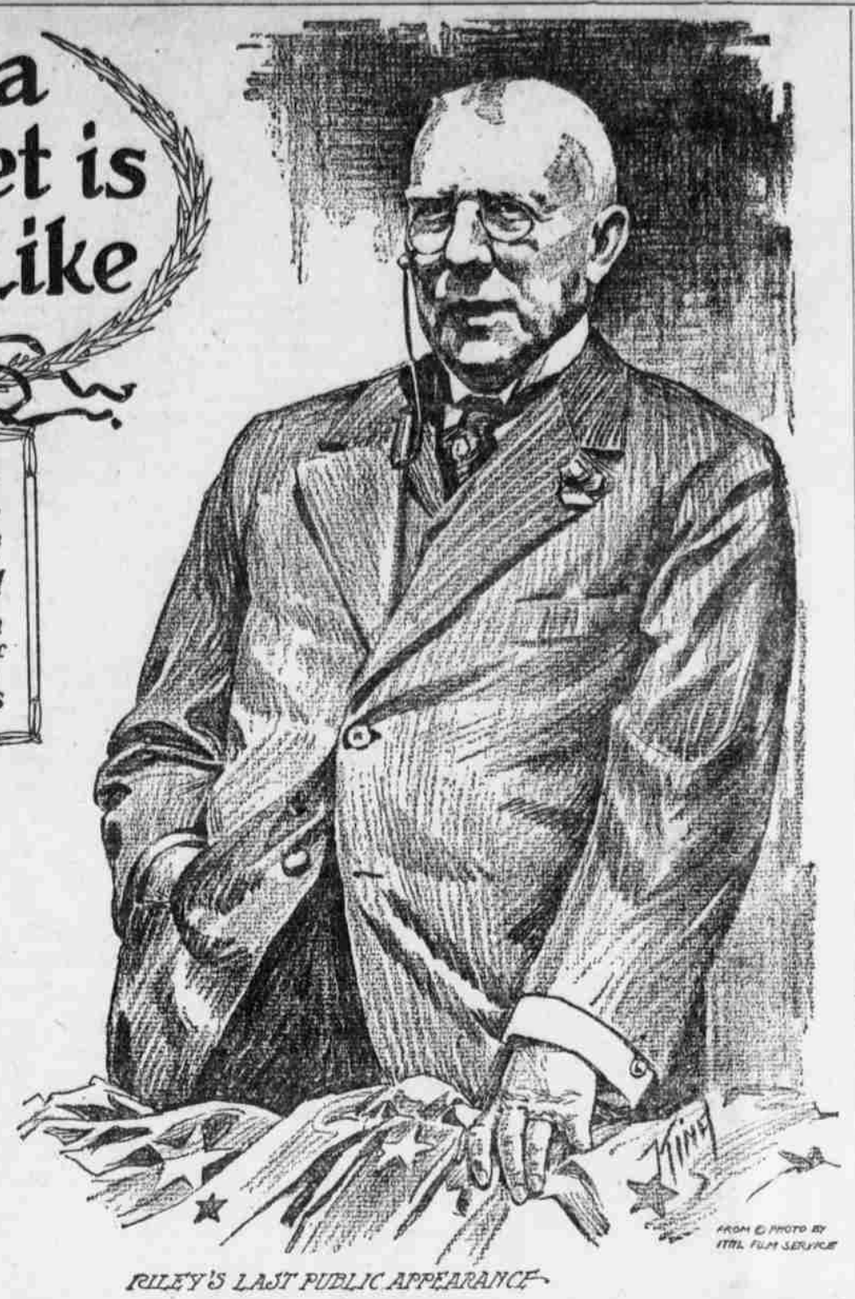
"The chief merit of Riley's dialect verse—which is the most popular part of his production and the part with which the critics chiefly concern themselves—is its effectiveness as a medium for character portrayal. Whimsical, lovable, homely, racy, quaint, salty, pathetic, humorous, tender are his dialect poems; essentially, he has shown us life as a superior writer of prose sketches might do, adding the charm of his lyricism.

"But, personally, we never like him so well as when he is writing sheer moonlight and music Probably no poet who ever wrote English—certainly no American poet—got more luscious language than Riley. A sweetness that is not so sugary that it cloys, having always a winy tang. For instance, from 'The Flying Islands of the Night:'

'. . . In lost hours of lute and song,
When he was but a prince—I but a mouth
For him to lift up sippingly and drain
To his most ultimate of stammering sobs
And maudlin wanderings of blinded breath. . . .'

"There is no better evidence of the genuineness of Riley's sentiment, particularly in the dialect poems, than the discretion with which he touches the pathetic chord when he touches it at all. One of the most popular poems he ever wrote was 'Old-Fashioned Roses,' and one word too much, one pressure the least bit too insistent would have made the thing as offensive as a vaudeville ballad. The taste which told him to be simple and the sincerity which begat the taste save the verses from the reproach.

"His verses for children and about children could only have been written by a man whose love and understanding of children was real, for children are quick to detect and repudiate anything of the sort that is 'pumped up' for effect, and they contributed enormously to the general feeling of affection for him. The regard of the children was in a way a testimonial to his persisting youthfulness of spirit; he was still their playmate; perhaps it is an earnest of immortality, if immortality can be. Certainly love endures longer than anything else, and this man with the childlike sweetness in his soul goes from us loved as few men have been."



RILEY'S LAST PUBLIC APPEARANCE

ROMANCE SEEN FROM SADDLE

Galloping Hoofs Constitute an Eternal Challenge to the Spirit of Youth.

Romance likes to come on horseback; the jingling spurs and bridle irons chant a happy pean in his ears, and from the saddle, as from the throne, he looks out over the workaday world, says a writer in Scribner's Magazine.

Romance always has been linked with riding; in the playroom mounted on a gallant rocking chair youth rides into a land of golden deeds; later he swings in long gallops on the faithful hobbyhorse into spicy and fugitive adventure. To the page on a prancing palfrey and to the cavalryman in khaki the lure of romance is the same; the rhythm of galloping hoofs thuds always in the imagination, the lady's favor on the lance and the quivering scarlet guidon flutter alike a mysterious and eternal challenge to the spirit of youth. "To horse and away," and all the world's before one.

Stevenson always wanted to write a story about a man galloping up to an inn at night, and the very suggestion brings a tingle to the imagination:

By on the highway low and loud,
By at the gallop goes he.

He heard him in the sleepless midnights of his childhood; and, indeed, the sound of thudding hoofs always makes the heart beat faster. The sociable clattering of a single footer on asphalt, the crackling of twigs and leaves on the quiet autumn trails, the muffled rhythm of a canter on the turf, its resonance on a bridge—all these make music in the ears and bring the very smell of adventure. To him who rides there is always "something lost behind the ranges"—and his heart yearns for it.

King Coal and Peat.

Southern gas and power producers are watching experiments being conducted in Sweden to determine the value of the use of peat powder as fuel for locomotives. A committee which has conducted several practical tests reports that the value of peat powder as fuel is one-third greater than the fuel value of coal. The cost of peat powder is estimated at $4.02 a ton compared with the price of coal $6.03 per ton. The committee has asked in appropriation from the Swedish government of $350,000 to be used to erect a peat powder factory, acquire peat bogs, and convert the locomotives of one railway line into peat powder burners. There is an immense quantity of peat in the bogs of the South, especially in Virginia and Florida. Some firms have been mining the peat and using it under boilers as fuel with satisfactory results and at a cost far below that of other fuel. It is also pointed out that the raw peat, cheaply prepared, might be used in gas producers. The process to be used in extracting the gas would be very similar to the process used in the extraction gas from coal. It is thought feasible to place gas works in the peat districts and pipe the gas produced, without loss, for about 25 or 30 miles to gas engines where the power could be converted into electricity for traction purposes.—Wall Street Journal.

Rewarding Italian Soldiers.

A salary scheme is being worked out in Italy, which promises to have good results. Salaries will be paid by employers to their employees, who are on active service the continuation of which will be regulated according to the number of years of previous service. The first clause provides for the reinstatement in their former positions of all employees having served for at least one year with the firm for which they were working at the entrance of Italy into the war. The clauses relating to salaries during the war are as follows: All workingmen with the colors who have been with a firm for at least five years are entitled to a third of their usual salaries during the continuation of the war. This applies to married men with families. In all other cases the employers shall pay the men at the rate of a quarter of their former salaries. Men with ten years' service to their credit will receive, if married, with families, one-half of their salaries, and if not married a third. The decree only applies to firms employing at least three workmen.

Oxygenerator Is Popular.

We did not have the locomotive, the aeroplane, the submarine, dreadnaught, electric lights, telegraph or telephone, wireless or automobile. These are all recent inventions. Twenty years ago when the automobile came out, we did not have electric lights, top wind shield, demountable rims, electric starters, multiple cylinder, perfected springs and a hundred and one other inventions which make it what it is today. It was nothing more than four wheels and a single cylinder engine, and a box for a body.

Compare, if you will, the highly perfected automobile of today. Those of the better class adopt necessities, but only after the public demands it. The public has shown that its wants the oxygenerator on its cars, and it is only by public demand that it will be furnished by the manufacturers.

Unfair.

"Sometimes I think Henrietta is a little unreasonable," said Mr. Meekton. "Henrietta wears her skirts as short as she likes and I never say a word."

"But you silently disapprove?"

"No. All I object to is her calling me down this morning because my new summer trousers are too lofty around the ankles."

Cats Fond of Needles.

Cats seem to have a habit of swallowing needles. When a cat is brought to a veterinary hospital suffering with a cough, the doctor always looks for a needle. In one instance Doctor Childs of New York operated on a cat to remove what he thought was an ordinary needle. He found a hatpin nine inches long. But the cat's life was saved.

Optimistic Thought.

No omen can be bad to those whose designs are good.

Lemberg and Brody

STREET SCENE IN LEMBERG

WHEN the fortifications of the inner city of Lemberg were dismantled in 1811 and the space which they occupied was converted into promenades for the prosperous citizens of this modern Galician capital of 200,000 inhabitants, it was doubtless assumed by many that, having suffered "the sling and arrows of outrageous fortune" for the five centuries of its municipal existence, fate would allot it a surcease from siege and capture, says the bulletin of the National Geographic society.

Lying 60 miles almost due east of Przemysl, and more than 450 miles northeast of Vienna, Lemberg is situated on the banks of the Peltew river, an affluent of the Bug. It nestles in a small valley which opens to the north, and is surrounded by hills, the most picturesque being the well-wooded Franz-Josef Berg to the northeast. To the east, a distance of 7 miles, is Tarnopol, near the Russian border, one of the first points of attack when the Muscovites pushed beyond the Galician frontier.

A description of the modern city of Lemberg as it existed in August, 1914, requires many modifications today, for the scars of war are to be found in its many handsome homes; its broad, well-paved streets; its Roman Catholic cathedral, a handsome gothic structure completed in 1480; its Greek cathedral, completed in 1779; its Armenian cathedral in the Byzantine style, dating back to 1437, and its magnificent monuments to such Polish patriots as King John III Sobieski who, after having saved Lemberg from the Turks a few years previously, in 1683 saved all Europe from Mohammedan invasion by routing an army of 300,000 Turks encamped about Vienna, his own force numbering only 70,000.

Nearly 700 Years Old.

Called Lwow in the Polish tongue and Leopolis in Latin, Lemberg was founded by a Ruthenian prince in 1259. Nearly a hundred years later it was added to the domain of Casimir the Great, who bestowed upon the city the charter and privileges widely known during the middle ages as the Magdeburg Right.

Following the fall of Constantinople, Lemberg enjoyed a revival of trade with the East, but it was caught in the maelstrom of rebellion and pillage which swept over the Ukraine and a part of Poland during the last half of the seventeenth century, when the Cossack hetman, Chmielnicka, was directing the infamies of the "serfs' fury."

Lemberg was one of the Polish cities to fall before the arms of Charles XII of Sweden when the ill-advised Augustus II was drawn into the Great Northern war, which devastated central Europe for the first 20 years of the eighteenth century. In 1772, upon the first partition of Poland, Lemberg became an Austrian possession, and 12 years after this event Joseph II established the University of Lemberg which, at the time of the outbreak of the present war, had more than 2,000 students.

One of the most attractive parks of Lemberg, and a favorite promenade, bears the name of the Polish patriot, Jan Kilinski, a humble little shoemaker, who fought bravely in 1796, was captured and taken to St. Petersburg. After his release he returned to his shoemaker's bench and in his leisure hours wrote his recollections, a valuable record of this period of his country's history.

Since the establishment of the Galician diet in 1861 Lemberg has enjoyed increasing prosperity. Its manufactures include machinery and ironware, matches, candles, liqueurs, chocolate, leather, bricks and tiles, while its commerce is largely in linen, flax, hemp, wool and oil.

In 1907 two interesting finds were made in the vicinity of this city by laborers boring for oil. The bodies of an elephant and a rhinoceros were unearthed in a remarkable state of preservation, even the hides being intact, due, probably, to the preservative qualities of the oily soil in which they were buried.

Brody a Commercial Center.

Only about two miles beyond the Russian border, the Galician town of Brody is a point of great strategic importance on the eastern war front because it controls an important railway line leading from Dubno, 35 miles to the northeast, to Lemberg, which is only 62 miles to the southwest.

At the beginning of the world war Brody was a thriving commercial center with a population approaching 20,000, more than two-thirds of whom were Jews. Its prosperity was checked to some extent about 40 years ago, when, after having enjoyed the privileges of a free commercial city for exactly 100 years, its charter was withdrawn.

Less than half a century before Brody was created a town in the seventeenth century it was the scene of an important battle in which the Poles, commanded by their famous grand hetman, Stanislaus Ponieckpolski, defeated a Tartar army. This was the last battle of Ponieckpolski's distinguished career. For a quarter of a century he was at war with Turks and Swedes, his initiation in military science being somewhat disastrous, for he was captured by the Turks in his first important engagement and was held in close confinement for three years at Constantinople. Upon his release in 1692 he was placed in command of the Polish republic's forces and with a force of 25,000 defeated 60,000 Tartars at Martynow. His achievements against the army of Gustavus Adolphus were no less noteworthy than his long series of victories whereby he succeeded in keeping the Ukraine under Polish rule.

Brody twice suffered from disastrous conflagrations during the nineteenth century. The first, occurring in 1801, destroyed 1,500 houses, while the fire of 1859 reduced 1,000 homes and business establishments to ashes.

The upper waters of the Styr river form an irregular arc extending from the southwest to the north of Brody, being ten miles distant at its nearest point, toward the northwest. Five miles from the city, just beyond the border on the Dubno-Lemberg railway, is the Russian town of Radziwilow, with a population of about 8,000.

The Log Line.

The log line is one of the older devices for measuring the velocity of a ship. The log is flat is made so that it will float perpendicularly. To this a line is fastened, called the log line. The approximate speed of the ship can be determined by letting the line run off for, say, half a minute. The length of the line run off in that time gives a basis for calculating the speed per hour. The log, during the experiment, remains stationary on the surface of the water, of course. This is the older method. A modern method involves the use of a log with a revolving mechanism which is dragged along in the water behind the vessel.

A Horrible Accident.

A popular sportsman, being vastly conceited about his fine figure, wore corsets to show it off. One day he was thrown from his horse and lay prone on the road. A farm laborer ran to render him assistance. The first-aid man began to feel the fallen one all over to see if any bones happened to be broken, and suddenly yelled out to another laborer:

"Run, Jack, for heaven's sake, for a doctor. Here's a man's ribs runnin' north and south, instead o' east and west."

CONDENSATIONS

The English language has 82 sounds.

Prince George of England, who is only fourteen years old, is an expert with knitting needles.

There are 3,500,000 acres of land in Spain devoted to the culture of olives.

Australia's sheep herd amounts to one-sixth of the world's total.

South America is producing imitation ivory.

One of the newer vacuum bottles can be taken entirely apart for cleansing.

George Dunbar of Lenox, Mass., says he has attended every circus which has been in Pittsfield for 70 years.

Letters to the number of 3,586,473, forming 775,693 words, 31,737 verses, 1,189 chapters and 66 books, make up the Bible.

In the course of ten years the Greek government has received $3,225,000 from lotteries.

Mr. Bentley, an American, has photographed 2,000 snow crystals and no two are exactly alike.

The Berlin military authorities are awarding an iron cross to all schoolmasters who induce 100 school children to subscribe to the war loans.

The British government recently purchased 1,000 tons of hay in Kansas City, which it will ship to some scene of hostility by way of New Orleans.

A large industry in Christiania, Norway, has leased its idle land at a cheap rate to its employees, who will erect thereon individual suburban homes of their own.

WORTH KNOWING

Operated like a pair of shears, a new implement revolves a buffer to polish the fingernails.

The 25,000 inhabitants which were credited to Dawson City, Alaska, during the height of the 1898 gold rush, have now dwindled to a mere 2,000.

Shoes with quickly removable soles and heels have been invented in France for railroad men, so that they can escape should their feet be caught in tracks.

USE ARABS TO FIGHT LOCUSTS

Soldiers Dig Trenches Into Which Hatching Pests Were Driven and Destroyed.

Djemal Pasha put some thousands of Arab soldiers at my brother's disposition, and these were set to work digging trenches into which the hatching locusts were driven and destroyed. This is the only means of coping with the situation; once the locusts get their wings, nothing can be done with them. It was a hopeless fight. Nothing short of the co-operation of every farmer in the country could have won the day; and while the people of the progressive Jewish villages struggled on to the end—men, women and children working in the fields until they were exhausted—the Arab farmers sat by with folded hands. The threats of the military authorities only stirred them to half-hearted efforts. Finally, after two months of toil, the campaign was given up and the locusts broke in waves over the countryside, destroying everything. As the Prophet Joel said: "The land is as the Garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness. The field is wasted; the land mourneth, for the corn is wasted; the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth."

Not only was every green leaf devoured, but the very bark was peeled from the trees, which stood out white and lifeless, like skeletons. The fields were striped to the ground, and the old men of our villages, who had given their lives to cultivating these gardens and vineyards, came out of the synagogues where they had been praying and wailing and looked on the ruin with dimmed eyes. Nothing was spared. The insects, in their fierce hunger, tried to engulf everything in their way.—Alexander Aaronsohn, in Atlantic.

Low Temperature.

The lowest known temperature ever observed by competent scientists was at Werchojausk, Siberia, Jan. 15, 1885, when a minimum reading of minus 93.4 degrees Fahrenheit was registered. The monthly mean temperature for January at Jakuts, Siberia, is minus 43.8 degrees.